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ABSTRACT

In this study of 152 people who are interested in alternative life styles, the author presents some empirical evidence regarding some of the predisposing factors that may influence individuals to reject the conventional monogamous marriage and become attracted to and involved in unconventional relationships. Stressing that the childhood experiences of participants are as important as immediate background for involvement in variant family forms, the author divided her questions into four parts: family background and perceived family happiness, opinions on selected attitudes, relationships with family and friends, and reasons for being interested in multilateral relationships. Overall, respondents had unhappy childhood experiences and little involvement with their families. They did, however, have strong friendships, and were very active in politics. The major reasons for involvement in an unconventional relationship were greater emotional involvement with others and greater opportunity for personal growth. (FC)

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Multilateral Relationships: Early Family Experiences and Present Involvement in Unconventional Family Forms (1), (2)

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INTRODUCTION

A number of writers have indicated that early socialization experiences are important for later socialization inputs, because the family transmits to the child the basic motivational aspects and the value orientations which will influence later socialization inputs. Furthermore, the conditions under which individuals are brought up - including family interactions, involvement, and perception of parental child rearing practices - do make a difference in their ways of life.

However, researchers in the area of alternative life styles and variant family forms have placed more emphasis in the immediate background for involvement in variant family forms than in the participant's early family experiences and kinship relationships. We believe that childhood experiences - including relationships with parents and parental child rearing practices - are of equal importance as are the immediate life experiences of an individual in determining who becomes interested in and who joins variant family forms.

Given the fact that the primary agency of socialization for most individuals is the family unit, it is clear that early life experiences constitute an important area for investigation in a study of unconventional behavior. Any researcher who is interested in determining the factors that may influence an individual to reject the conventional monogamous marriage and to select to get involved and live in a variant family form, such as a group or multilateral marriage, cannot place all his/her explanatory conditions in the immediate past but must also examine the earlier and basic life conditions of the individual.

The origins, as well as the future, of some variant life styles may thus be known only when we study some combination of current interests and experiences, personality characteristics, and earlier life experiences. The diversity of life styles can be explained by the diversity of influences upon the individual.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In this paper we examine the nature of early family relationships of a group of individuals who are living or who are interested in multilateral marriages or in unconventional relationships. Furthermore, data are presented regarding current relations with parents and kin.

Research studies have indicated that individuals who have relatively low levels of involvement with their families also tend to have relatively low levels of involvement with friends. Involvement with family and friends is being examined in this paper and an extensive analysis of these interactions is presented.

In addition, we present data regarding the respondents' political and religious attitudes and values, as well as the political and religious values of their families of orientation. Since many studies suggest that the political and religious values of individuals who are involved in nontraditional family forms are more liberal than those of the members of traditional marriage forms, we believe that an examination of these values is of vital importance.

We also present an examination of some personal reasons respondents gave for participating in multilateral marriage. The results are compared with two other studies (Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Ramey, 1975).

The subjects were also asked to respond to a number of questions dealing with specific political and social values. Among the issues these questions dealt with were equal rights and opportunities for men and women, sexual morality, homosexuality, pornography, civil disobedience, and personal freedom.

The main purpose of this paper is to present some empirical evidence regarding some of the predisposing factors that may influence individuals to reject the conventional monogamous marriage and become attracted to and involved in unconventional relationships.

THE SAMPLE

The analyses presented in this paper are based on data collected from 152 respondents all of whom were on the FAMILY SYNERGY active mailing list during the time the data of a larger project, which is still in progress, were collected. FAMILY SYNERGY is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization for people interested in alternative life styles. The organization was founded in July, 1971 and is located in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area.

Interview instruments were mailed to all individuals who were on the FAMILY SYNERGY mailing list during the month of February, 1974. All organizations, and individuals whose names were on the mailing list solely for professional reasons and not because of personal commitment to the philosophy of the organization, were excluded from the analysis of the data. Our sample is composed of an almost equal number of male and female respondents, specifically, 80 males and 72 females. We had a 52 percent return rate and we have no information concerning the life style

or social and family characteristics of those who did not return our questionnaire. For this reason our findings, evaluations and conclusions are limited to these individuals who answered our interview instrument.

The questionnaire was designed specifically for this study and consisted of four parts. The majority of the questions were of the fixed-alternative type on at least a three point continuum, in which respondents were asked to indicate their answers.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 80 men and 72 women. The mean age for men was 40.14 years and the range from 23 years to 60 years, while the mean age for women was 36.29 years with a range of 19 to 59 years. The average level of educational attainment was sixteen years of schooling with a standard deviation of 1.57. Sixty seven percent of the sample had graduated from college, 23 percent had some college education and only tem percent had completed high school or less.

The social class of the sample appears to be primarily upp-middle class with an average family income of $18,645.00 a year. The sample was 10 percent Jewish, 10 percent Protestant, 15 percent Humanist, but the majority of the sample, specifically over 50 percent, stated that they had not any religious affiliation (56 percent).

Regarding their legal marital status, over fifty percent of our respondents stated that they were legally married (54.2 percent), 10 percent were separated from their legal spouse, 26 percent were divorced, 8 percent were single and 2 percent were widowed. Moreover, 78 percent indicated that they were living in some kind of sexually open relationship.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND PERCEIVED FAMILY HAPPINESS

Family environment and quality of life experiences during a person's formative years and during adolescence, are important determinants for personal happiness. Studies indicate that role modeling is one of the primary aspects of socialization processes that occur in one's family circle, and degree of parental marital happiness may produce strong predispositions for personal happiness. Several questions were included in our interview instrument to assess these factors.

Most of our respondents lived with their parents during childhood and adolescence. Of the 41 respondents who did not live continuously with their parents during their formative years, 17 stated that their parents had been divorced and 16 respondents indicated that family continuity had been broken due to the death of one of their parents. Five respondents had lived with their grandmother, most of the time, and three had lived in boarding schools. When asked to rank the happiness of their parents' marriage, almost 40 percent of our respondents stated that their parents' marriages were either very happy or happy, the proportions varying little with sex of respondent (19) percent male and 20 percent female), while 36 percent defined their parents' marriages as unhappy or very unhappy (19 percent male and 17 percent female). A smaller proportion of our respondents (25 percent) said that they perceived their parents' marriages to be satisfactory. Moreover, when asked about the degree of family happiness 42 percent said that their family life was unhappy or very unhappy during childhood and adolescence, while 29 percent stated that their family life was rather satisfactory

and another 29 percent said that they remembered their family life as happy or very happy.

Respondents were also asked to describe their parents' child rearing practices and specifically the degree of permissiveness they thought they had in their family of orientation. More males than females felt that the kind of discipline they received from their parents was either strict or authoritarian, while more females than males stated that their parents were either permissive or flexible and inconsistent. Specifically, 25 percent of the males felt their parents were strict or authoritarian, while 18 percent of the females felt this way. On the other hand, 30 percent of female respondents and 27 percent of the male respondents stated that their parents were either permissive or flexible.

Several researchers who have conducted studies in the area of unconventional relationships, such as mate-swapping, swinging and group marriage, report their subjects are much more liberal in both their religious and political attitudes than people living in conventional marriages (Bartell, 1970; Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Gilmartin, 1974).

Respondents were asked to define both the religious and political orientations of their parents, as well as their own religious and political affiliations and orientations. More than half said they were raised in religious or very religious families (59 percent), while 17 percent said they were brought up in a nonreligious home, and 22 percent were reared in a somewhat religious environment.

As present-day adults, 21 percent define themselves as strongly religious or religious, while the majority of both men and women define

themselves as not religious at all (48 percent). However, it cannot be inferred from this data that our respondents have rejected all types of religious beliefs, but rather that they have disassociated themselves from conventional religious institutions.

Looking at the denomination in which the respondents were raised and their present-day religious affiliation we notice that 58 percent were raised as Catholics or Protestants, but only 10 percent currently define themselves as such. Only 10 percent consider themselves as Jewish, while 23 percent were raised as Jewish. Five percent were raised either as Mormons or Unitarians, and only 12 percent had no religious affiliation in their families of orientation. As adults, more than half have no religious affiliation and they consider themselves as humanists or agnostics (71 percent).

Regarding their political orientations and the political orientations of their parents, we notice that our respondents are less oriented toward party politics than their parents and tend to be more liberal or radical in their orientations than their parents. While 65 percent defined themselves as liberal or radical, only 33 percent stated that their parents' political orientations were either liberal or radical. Moreover, 28 percent defined their parents as very conservative, while only 5 percent stated that they themselves were conservative. However, most of them are oriented towards party politics - 50 percent are Democrats and 11 percent Republicans - while a smaller number, 28 percent, are not politically oriented at all.

Our findings, regarding both religious and political orientations, are similar to those reported by other researchers who have studied people

living in unconventional relationships, but in contrast to previous studies (Constantine and Constantine, 1973; Gilmartin, 1974), most of our respondents are oriented towards party politics and are actively interested in politics, as their answers to our questions regarding voting patterns and level of interest in politics reveal. Ninety-three percent stated that they voted in the last election, and 51 percent indicated that they were very interested in politics.

OPINIONS ON SELECTED ATTITUDES

We have seen that our respondents tend to be significantly liberal in their orientations towards religion and politics, which is an indication of rejection of conventional religious or political institutions. However, this finding was more pronounced in regard to their religious orientations.

To determine their level of liberality in other areas as well, we asked them to respond to a series of questions dealing with social and political values. We compared their responses to these issues to the responses given on some of the same issues by the respondents in the Constantine study (1973) of "group marriage" and to the responses given by a sample from a large-scale survey conducted by Athanasiou et al. among readers of the "Psychology Today" magazine (1970). Among the issues covered by questions in this section of our study we present data regarding our respondents opinions on equal rights and opportunities for men and women, sexual morality, civil disobedience, love, and personal freedom. Our respondents' degree of agreement or disagreement regarding these social issues is presented in tabular form in Table 1.

(Table 1 about here)

All in all, male-female differences were few and they were not statistically significant in most of the social and political issues on which our respondents offered their opinions. There were some statistically significant differences between males and females on several of the items dealing with sexual behavior, with males holding more liberal attitudes than females.

A representative example of the males' more liberal value orientations can be seen on their approval or rejection of statements such as: "Public sexual behavior among consenting adults should be legal", "Sexual involvement between parents and children is not necessarily bad" and "Homosexuals should be considered no better than criminals". These differences were significant beyond the .05 level. In one statement, however, that dealt with amnesty or lenient treatment of draft dodgers, women were more liberal than men. This difference was significant beyond the .05 level.

As we expected, our respondents of both sexes expressed significantly more liberal attitudes, on most items, than the respondents of the "Sex" survey of the "Psychology Today" magazine (Athanasiou et al., 1970). Moreover, our respondents exhibited a higher level of approval or rejection on several items than did the respondents in the Constantine (1973) study on "Group Marriage". However, our respondents held the same value orientations towards love as did the subjects in the Constantine study. The majority of both men and women strongly agreed with the statement that "Most of us can sincerely love more than one person at the same time". In general, our respondents tend to be more liberal and in favor of "sexual freedom" than the respondents of previous studies in the area of unconventional relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Several studies indicate that people who are involved in unconventional relationships are relatively isolated and have weaker ties with their relatives, as well as lower levels of involvement in the traditional religious or political institutions. In addition, several studies have indicated that individuals who have relatively low levels of involvement with their families also tend to have relatively low levels of involvement with friends.

Earlier in this paper we examined levels of involvement in the traditional religious and political institutions and our findings, in contrast to those of other researchers in the area of unconventional relationships (Bartell, 1970; Constantines, 1973; Gilmartin, 1974), revealed that our respondents were highly involved in at least one of the two conventional institutions, that is the political institution.

Given, though, the fact that most of our respondents felt that they were brought up by parents who were strict or authoritarian in their child rearing practices, and taking into consideration our findings regarding their low levels of family happiness in their families of orientation, we expected that their current relationships with family and kin would continue to be distant and of relatively low importance.

The respondents were asked to describe the levels of interaction they maintained with their relatives and friends and the importance of their relatives and friends to them. Respondents of both sexes reported low levels of interaction with parents and siblings and even lower levels of interaction with other relatives. The majority of those respondents

who stated that their parents were still living (N=125), reported that they visited with them less than once a year (36 percent), or from one to five times a year (30 percent). A small number (11 percent) stated that they visited their parents from 6 to 11 times a year, and another 12 percent visited their parents 1 to 3 times a month. Even when we controlled for distance and looked at the interaction levels of those respondents whose parents lived within the same metropolitan area, levels of interaction were still low.

Moreover, 40 percent visited with their siblings less than once a year and another 40 persent between one to five times a year. Regarding their interaction levels with other relatives, 25 percent stated that they never visited with their relatives and another 25 percent visited with them less than once a year.

Finally, the respondents were asked to rank their relationships with family members and friends in the order of their importance to them on a scale from 1, most important to 5, least important. Only 10 percent ranked parents as most important. The majority of respondents of both sexes did not rank their relationship to their siblings in either of the two extreme categories. Thirty percent gave a rank of 2 and 38 percent a rank of 3. However, the majority of respondents ranked their relationship to their relatives as least important (30 percent) or gave a rank of four (48 percent). All in all, male-female differences were very small and were not statistically significant.

On the basis of these findings, it seems that people living in unconventional relationships do not maintain close relationships with their families of orientation and other relatives. However, we cannot

say that our respondents were socially isolated. Our study revealed a very high level of interaction with friends and, as expected, respondents ranked their relationships to their friends as the most important of all others. Only 3 percent stated that they visited a friend one to five times a year; twenty-six percent visited with a friend once or three times a month, 46 percent from one to three times a week and 13 percent spent sometime with a friend daily. The comparable percentages regarding the importance of their friends to them, revealed that their relationships were very important to them. Fifty-two percent ranked their relationship to their friends as the most important, while only 4 percent ranked friends as least important.

REASONS FOR BEING INTERESTED IN MULTILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS

Innovative forms of marital relationships have received considerable attention from writers and social science researchers in the last few years and a number of books, articles and research findings have been published describing them. Most of the research in this new area has focused, primarily, on comarital and extramarital relationships and very little professional work has been done on multilateral relationships or group marriage. One of the first studies, that was specifically designed to examine the life styles of individuals living in multilateral marriages, was a study conducted by Larry and Joan Constantine (1973). One of the basic questions these authors set out to study in their research was dealing with the motivations for participating in a multilateral marriage. In their book, Group Marriage, the authors present a list of 47 reasons people gave for participating in group marriage. With their permission

we used 24 of these in the present study's list of 27 reasons for being interested in participating in group marriage.

Respondents were asked to indicate which were their reasons and which were their strong reasons for being interested in group marriage. The ten highest ranked reasons and the ten lowest ranked reasons for being interested in multilateral marriage follow, in decreasing rank order by weighted sum of number indicating reason or strong reason.

(Table 2 about here)

We compared our findings to the reasons given by the participants of the multilateral marriages in the Constantine study (1973) and to the reasons given by the respondents in a study of "intimate groups and Networks" conducted by Ramey (1975). (Ramey used 35 of the original list of 47 reasons included in the Constantine study).

As can be seen in Table 2, eighty-two percent checked "opportunity for personal growth" as among reasons for being interested in multilateral marriage, and 72 percent checked "variety of sexual partners". Most of top ten items involved either statements related to personal growth or a desire to be close and emotionally involved with others. From the same data we identified the least important reasons people checked for getting involved in multilateral relationships (Table 2). At the very bottom of the list were statements such as "Protesting establishment" and "Religious principles/beliefs".

The findings of the present study are very similar to the results reported by the Constantines' (1973). One item, "variety of sexual partners", appears as second from the top on the list in the Constantine study and as ninth in our list. However, the overall pattern appears to be the same

in both studies. Specifically, seven items appear on both lists of most important reasons. These items are: "Greater intellectual variety," "Opportunity for personal growth," "New aspects of personality emerge relating to more people," "Sense of personal fulfillment," "Increased self-awareness," "Feeling loved, desired or wanted more," and "Variety of sexual partners." Three items appear in the Ramey study as well. These items are: "New aspects of personality emerge relating to more people," Sense of belongingness" and "Feeling loved, desired or wanted more."

Regarding "least important reasons" only one item "Protesting establishment" appears on all three "least checked" lists. However, three items appear on this study's list and in the Constantine study. These items are: "Less individual responsibility," "Protesting establishment," and "Religious principles/beliefs."

Despite these differences, the overall pattern that emerges from comparing these three studies is very similar in regard to reasons given by the participants for being interested in multilateral relationships (Constantine, 1973; Pitsiou, 1977), or intimate friendship networks (Ramey, 1975). Furthermore, our findings support the statement made by most of our respondents, that one of their primary reasons for joining these unconventional marital relationships is their concern with personal growth. (Pitsiou & Lafollette, 1974).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The major objective of this paper has been to provide some empirical evidence regarding some of the predisposing factors that may influence individuals to reject the conventional monogamous marriage and become attracted to and involved in multilateral relationships.

As a group, our respondents were found to have unhappy childhood experiences and they maintained a very low level of involvement with their families of orientation. But there was no indication in the data that our subjects were social isolates. Indeed, besides being very active in at least one of the formal institutions, Politics, the subjects were also found to be very active socially. Specifically, the majority of our respondents had a very high level of interaction with their friends and considered their relationship to their friends as one of the most important to them.

Finally, our respondents clearly indicated in several of their statements that their major reasons for being interested in multilateral relationships is a desire to be emotionally involved with others and an opportunity to achieve greater personal growth. While interest in sexual variety was s strong reason for a high proportion of our respondents, it was not one of the highest ranked reasons.

Given the fact that our sample is composed by a large number of respondents who have attained high levels of education, who are primarily upper-middle class and over 40 years of age, preoccupation with personal growth, as expressed in several of their statements, is not a surprising finding. In accordance with Maslow's conceptualization, as individuals

go through life they are striving toward a realization of their full potentialities, so that "...gratification of one basic need opens consciousness to domination by another 'higher' need" (Maslow, 1968:153).

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TABLE 1. SELECTED ATTITUDES ON SEVERAL SOCIAL ISSUES

ATTITUDE	MEAN RATING[1]
The law has no business regulating sexual relations between consenting adults.	1.1*
Women should be free to initiate sexual activity.	1.1
In general, women do not enjoy sex as much as men.	4.4
Easy access to birth control devices increases promiscuity.	3.7
Homosexuals should be considered no better than criminals.	4.8*
Most of us can sincerely love any one of several people.	1.3
Any form of marriage that individuals find fulfilling should be legal.	1.3
Public sexual behavior among consenting adults should be legal.	2.8*
Social nudity in public places, such as free beaches, is acceptable and should be legal.	1.3
Sexual involvement between parents and children is not necessarily bad.	2.7*
Sexual involvement between brothers and sisters is not necessarily bad.	2.4*
Men and women should have completely equal rights and opportunities.	1.1
Men should be free to do housework and raise children, instead of being the provider, if they desire.	1.2
Women should be free to hold jobs and pursue careers instead of doing housework and raising children, if they desire.	1.1
The ability to relate sexually to individuals of both sexes is healthy and desirable.	2.0*

TABLE 1. (continued)

ATTITUDE	MEAN RATING[1]
A marriage should be terminated if it is no longer satisfying to either spouse.	1.7
A divorce should be avoided at all costs if there are young children involved.	4.5
Morality is a matter of individual conscience.	1.8
Extremely strict moral codes often cause mental illness.	2.0
Sex play among children is healthy and should not be interfered with.	1.7*
People should obey the laws of the land, whether they agree with them or not.	3.7*
Most of us can sincerely love more than one person at the same time.	1.4
In most cases the courts are too lenient with criminals.	3.7
Racists and fascists should not be allowed to speak on our public college and university campuses.	4.4
Viet Nam draft dodgers are criminals and should not be given amnesty or lenient treatment.	4.5**
Revolutionaries and communists should not be allowed to speak on our public college and university campuses.	4.5
Pornography must be regulated (censored) to protect children and the general public from moral corruption.	4.5

1. On a scale of 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. Differences between males and females were not statistically significant for most items, but men (*) were more liberal than women in eight items, while women (**) were more liberal than men in one item. These differences were significant beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 2. Most important reasons given for participating or being interested in multilateral marriage.

REASONS	TOTAL PERCENT	PERCENT STRONG REASON
Greater intellectual variety	84	40
Opportunity for personal growth	82	46
New aspects of personality emerge relating to more people	82	46
Sense of personal fulfillment	79	46
Sense of belongingness	79	36
Sense of "family"	76	37
Increased self-awareness	74	39
Feeling loved, desired, or wanted	74	36
Variety of sexual partners	72	32
Sense of isolation in conventional relationship	70	36

Least important reasons given for participating or being interested in multilateral marriage.

REASONS	TOTAL PERCENT	PERCENT STRONG REASON
Satisfy missing elements in my present relationship	52	21
Eliminate boredom or staleness	53	19
Close relationships with others of the same sex	53	16
Easier child-rearing	39	13
More chance for vocational variety	35	11
More stability than conventional family/marriage	30	11
Strengthen bond with present spouse	36	7
Less individual responsibility	37	5
Protesting establishment	18	3
Religious principles/beliefs	17	1

All items are listed in decreasing rank order by weighted sum of number indicating reason or strong reason.

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